Funding music projects that change young lives



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# Round the world and Bach

## David Juritz has a simple idea…

As I was approaching my 50th birthday, I took stock. With a long-held unrealised ambition – to busk round the world – and a need to do something a bit different, I decided it was now or never. A round-the-world busk for charity.

But which charity? Like many of us I had been inspired by the work of organisations like El Sistema in Venezuela and Buskaid in South Africa. Both support music education for children, and I wanted to do something to help teachers start similar projects in developing countries.

Since no charity existed that was dedicated to helping teachers over the first and biggest hurdle – buying instruments and setting up the project – Musequality was formed to fill this gap.

The plan was simple. It took me two minutes:
**1** Leave the house with a fiddle, backpack and completely empty wallet
**2** Go down to the local tube station and start playing Bach
**3** Wait until I've enough money to move on.

Jane, my wife, agreed provided I promised to bring her tea in bed for life. My children gave their permission, as long as I swore not to come back with a beard or any hint of body odour, and never to wear socks with my sandals.

## Day one: Chiswick, west London

I left my home on 9 June 2007 armed with a brand new violin made specially for the trip by my friend, Brian Lisus. At Turnham Green tube station I was greeted by a large number of my neighbours, who generously gave me just enough cash for a one-way ticket to somewhere very far away.

## A nobody on a pavement

I started with a circuit of Europe, sleeping on trains to save money. Busking took a bit of re-adjustment, as I discovered on the steps outside the Tonhalle in Zurich. After 20 minutes I'd made two Swiss francs – four hundred times less than I'd earned last time I played there. Berlin wasn't much better – €11 in a day, although Leipzig made up for it – €284 in two hours.

John MacGregor, the British Ambassador in Vienna and a very fine pianist, invited me to give a concert at his residence. Five days into the tour and already it was a treat to play indoors.

## First leg: Africa to Australia

From Europe I travelled to Africa, to visit the groups that Musequality was thinking of sponsoring. After Kampala in Uganda, and Cape Town and Soweto in South Africa, I hopped across the Southern Ocean to Australia.

Against my expectations, the Aussies really took to Bach. In Melbourne I sold myself on eBay (to do a concert in someone's living room), and in Sydney was treated to a free violin lesson by a passer-by: 'You've got to hold the notes longer to earn money. You won't get anything playing short notes like that.' If only Bach had known.

A stopover in Singapore turned out to be longer than expected as I'd not got the necessary visa for India. I diverted to Taipei before coming back to the UK to check if the family still remembered me. Oh, and to direct the Burton Bradstock Festival.

## Second leg: the Far East and South America

Late August and I was back on the road. I'd been warned that Hong Kong was busker-hostile, and sure enough I spent the first couple of days being chased around by security guards. But then I found a perfect busking spot and a lodging with some wonderful hosts, who invited me back two weeks later to do two benefit appearances which raised a substantial amount.

**Facts and figures**

- busked in 50 cities in 24 countries in every continent except the Antarctic
- played the entire repertoire for solo violin by Bach
- repeated the E major prelude over 300 times
- used 14 violin strings
- drew the bow an estimated 500 miles across the strings
- played over two million notes
- wore through just two pairs of socks and lost two and a half pairs
- learned how to say "thank you" in 13 languages
- raised an average of £83 a day (the least £7.71 in Berlin; the most £2,509.60 in London)
- paid for nine nights' accommodation out of 137 nights in total
- was put up for 14 nights by people who heard him busking or read about him in newspapers
- auctioned himself (well, a recital) on Ebay in eight cities
- raised over £13,000 by busking to cover the costs of his journey, meals, launderettes and the occasional beer
- raised £25,000 in donations to Musequality
- made connections, in numerous countries, which will benefit Musequality in the long term. To all of them, David says a big thank you!

Security guard cat-and-mouse continued in Shanghai. In Beijing I was warned that Tiananmen Square was a non-starter, although I did get the fiddle out for a photo.

Yoyogi Park in Tokyo, surrounded on all sides by amplified rock bands, was surreal. In Seoul I had a standoff with the local constabulary and a bit of a problem getting a haircut – apparently barber's poles advertise a different kind of service there.

After a second stop in Hong Kong, I headed for Buenos Aires via Los Angeles. I was pretty wrecked when I arrived but an invite to a tango recording session, two hours after I arrived, was too good to turn down.

I arrived in Rio after a short stop in Montevideo. Hot tip of the trip: the Maze guesthouse, perched on a hilltop in the favela of Catete (have a look at www.jazzrio.com and book yourself in).

In Venezuela I was blown away by a visit to El Sistema and meeting Mr Abreu (pictured above). It's a wonderful organisation involving a quarter of a million Venezuelan children. They offered to help Musequality develop projects and provide teacher training.

## Final leg: North America and home

The final leg was a circuit of North America starting in Miami, over to the west coast, up to Vancouver, across to Toronto, finishing up with Chicago and the east coast. By now, I was feeling like a rabbit in the headlights and in danger of running out of steam. There was, however, one landmark moment to lift the spirits. Pairing my socks after doing my last load of laundry – five pairs and three days to go. Cosmic.

## Job done

We'd contacted the Prime Minister to see if there was any chance of me finishing up on the steps of 10 Downing Street. Permission came just before I boarded the plane at JFK, so on Wednesday, 24 October, four and a half months after I set off, it was straight to Number 10 from Heathrow. I scraped away, Gordon Brown sent down a gratefully received contribution, and that was that.

All the way along, my wife Jane and, for the last nine weeks, project manager Jo had been working all hours in London relaying messages to me via phone (bill paid by Toshiba) and email. Keeping everything charged up was a necessity. So were internet connections.

The amount of money landing in my fiddle case varied wildly right up until the last day. In one hour, at Stanford University, I made $480. The next day in Santa Monica – $10 in three hours.

I made it to 50 towns and cities in 24 countries. With an average of three hours playing a day I knocked out the E major prelude over 300 times, the Chaconne about 180 times.

## What have I learned?

**1** It's very easy to be ignored. Don't assume that people will always appreciate what you have to offer. Ironically, outside concert halls were often the worst places to busk.
**2** It's not easy to turn publicity into money.
**3** There are a lot of good people out there. I had a fantastic amount of help, and no big problems – not mugged once, although at times I was walking around with over $1,000 in my fiddle case.
**4** Music really can make a difference to young kids who are trying to find an identity. Music also kept me sane. No matter how tough a day had been, an hour's playing always gave me a chance to regroup.
**5** And, finally, there's no place like home. And definitely no such thing as a simple idea.

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